

Alaska Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Scoping Meeting Synopsis

Loussac Library, Anchorage

February 20, 2003 at 10:00 am--Noon

The people who attended our scoping meeting were excited about the possibilities of increased cooperation among State and federal governments and faith-based organizations. However, several expressed concern about government intrusion into their ministries. How much of their mission/message would they have to sacrifice in order to receive government help? They do not want government to restrict their activity and keep them from practicing their faith while ministering to those in need.

Faith-based and community organizations could do some things better with a little help. Help not just from the government but by associating with other people and pulling together to combine resources.

We are not proposing something radically different from what government is already doing with volunteer organizations. We simply want to take the next step by identifying what we can do to make things better.

One idea came from a pilot who provides services to missionary organizations. The FAA says that if he accepts reimbursement payment for fuel he moves into a more restrictive category. His insurance rates, if even available at all, will rise perhaps to the point where this pilot can no longer afford to maintain his charitable services. He wants the federal rules can be changed to allow for cost reimbursement for his service. Can we change other rules to encourage people to participate in ministries?

Following up on Chaplain Mike Ensich's presentation, a question was posed about how the Texas model he highlighted might be replicated in Alaska. Currently the number of certified providers for court-ordered services is limited. This creates waiting lists and barriers to service choices as well as time delays. The certification process is cumbersome and in many instances appears to be biased toward secular services. Faith ministries wanting to provide court ordered parenting, domestic violence, anger management and substance abuse services find it difficult to obtain certification and recognition as an alternative option.

Another idea that is being explored and considered is the recent 211 initiative. The FCC has designated 211 as the number for health and human services information and referral. A national goal and vision exists for 211 to be the nationwide number to access community resources.

Given that many faith-based organizations are providing social ministries, a question was asked about establishing a central clearinghouse database. AKInfo was identified as the Internet-based directory of health and human services in Alaska with 24-hour toll free telephone support. The web site for AKInfo is www.ak.org; the toll free number is 800-478-2221. The database, which is funded by DHSS and United Way of Anchorage, contains more than 2000 listings of a wide range of human services. Faith organizations are welcome to list quality-of-life ministries they offer to the public.

Balan Ayyar, a representative from The White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, spoke of President Bush's desire for government to work side by side with faith-based communities. He encouraged us to visit the White House's web site at: www.fbc.gov. This site offers a wealth of information ranging from grant applications to remarks of the President.